

C. Niah Excavations, 1957-1961

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At the last Pacific Science Congress in Bangkok, I showed a film and gave a report on the major excavations started by the Sarawak Museum at the Niah Caves, 300 miles north-east of Sarawak's capital Kuching, in 1954 up to 1957. During 1961-2, a full length colour film is being made. We are showing at this Congress a shorter film of recent work.

This work, since 1957, has developed along three main lines:

i. The annual development of the original site of the West mouth in the Great Cave (27 acres) continuing down through an unbroken series of strictly human deposits, beginning with the very end of the neolithic (and beginning of metal) in the top inches and now reaching down 70 inches below the last C-14 date, at the level now calculated to be about 100,000 B.C. Recent major finds include most of a human skull shortly to be reported upon in detail by Dr Don Brothwell of Cambridge; and non-fossil food-bone of the extinct Giant Pangolin (*Manis Palaeojavanica Dubios*) previously only known in fossil form from middle Pleistocene deposits associated with Pithicanthropus in Java.

ii. Detailed study of the later Chalcolithic, bronze and early iron sites discovered from 1957 on in the labyrinth of caves not then understood to exist. This has included full-scale excavation of early cemeteries and trading stations, connected with the exploitation of edible bird-nests (more than 2 million built in the caves each year) back into the T'ang Dynasty [A.D. 618-905] or earlier. This part of the work has been supported with grants from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

iii. The general exploration, both of the amazingly elaborate cave labyrinth inside the Niah mountain and the related prehistoric cultures in West Borneo, including recent elements surviving in the neighbourhood up to the present day. For instance we have recorded, taped and filmed the funeral rites of the relic nomadic Punans in the Niah River, which closely relate to the prehistoric rituals enacted inside the 'Painted Cave', and in front of its hundreds of feet of beautiful hæmatite wall drawings and carved ships-of-the-dead, often in the same metaphor then as now.

Preliminary reports on some aspects of the work have been given in *Man* (2 fully illustrated papers), *Nature* (3 communications, in co-authorship with Lord Medway and Dr Hooijer), *Archæological News Letter*, *Asian Perspectives*, and in a series of special supplements to the last five issues of the *Sarawak Museum Journal*; also in popular form in *Life*, the *London Observer*, *New York Times*, etc.